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ABSTRACT

Students Asking Questions (SAQ) has proved to be a simple, effective method for teaching urban third grade students to generate literal, inferential, and critical questions from their readings of instructional materials. Teachers using the SAQ method prepare students for reading a selection from a basal reader by offering one literal, one inferential, and one critical question about the material as models. The teacher asks these sample questions and solicits similar questions from the students during regular reading lessons and encourages the students to create and record their own questions about texts during and after silent reading. When the effect of SAQ on student question generation was investigated in 12 third-grade classrooms, the results showed that students of low, average, and high reading abilities in the SAQ groups generated significantly more literal, inferential, and critical questions than comparable students in control groups. The advantages of SAQ include its adaptability to any written materials, its effectiveness with groups of varying sizes, increased student participation in class discussions, and the integration of reading, writing, and listening skills. Thus SAQ can renew enthusiasm for the instructional process while it involves readers in the process of thinking and communicating. (RL)

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Teaching the Language Arts Through SAQ: Students Asking Questions

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"Happiness is being able to ask why." The student who made this statement has learned that there is value in asking questions as well as in knowing the right answer to questions. What is the value in teaching students to ask questions?

"Norton (1980) discusses the value of providing students with opportunities to ask appropriate questions as one way of improving oral communication skills. Guszak (1967), Gall (1970), Manzo (1969), Helfeldt and Lalik (1976), and Ortiz (1977) among others have cited the desirability of teaching students to ask questions as a vehicle for comprehension instruction. Tredt and Tredt (1967), Smith (1969), Hennings (1975), and Zahorik (1971) all refer to the relationship between students asking questions and the thinking act. According to Hennings, "Only when the students assume the role of questioner is the teacher certain that the students can carry on the cognitive operations independently."

In a discussion of questioning in the classroom, Zahorik refers to educational spokesmen who have supported the goal of fostering student inquiry or self-learning and to the natural preschool question-asking nature of children as support for this role reversal. To increase student questioning related to substantive matters he included in his suggestions to teachers the notion of the teacher as a model. "Teachers should ask the kinds of questions they want pupils to ask." (p. 361)

Students Asking Questions (SAQ) is a systematic approach to teaching students to actively participate in instruction by learning to generate literal, inferential, and critical questions with the teacher as a model. SAQ is a technique which teachers can easily adapt to their instructional materials with one important preparation step.

Before teaching a selection from a basal reader, content area text, or any written instructional material the teacher prepares 3 model questions over the material, one literal, one inferential, and one critical. A useful guideline for distinguishing the three types is to consider the source of the answer to the question. Answers to literal questions are found explicitly stated in the written material. Answers to inferential questions are implied and supported in the written material. Critical questions are judgments, evaluations, feelings, or opinions the student has in relation to the content. The teacher records the model questions on separate strips of paper, an overhead projector, the chalkboard, or chart paper.

Once the model questions are prepared, the teacher conducts the lesson according to good teaching practice including building background, introducing vocabulary, setting purposes, assigning silent reading, and comprehension discussion. However, one variation is made in the discussion. The teacher's role is not only to ask questions but also to facilitate the acquisition of student asking skills. In the first phase of SAQ, the teacher begins by asking the students the literal question being sure it can be seen by all the students. Next, the answer is solicited and its acceptability agreed upon. Then the teacher provides the students with the opportunity to generate similar questions by completing two steps.

The first step is to ask the students how they know that is the answer. Usually, with no hesitation, the response is that the answer is stated in the story, book, or article. The second step is to have students formulate questions for which the answers are explicitly stated in the

written material. A simple question like the following will work: "Can you think of a question like that?" Again, with little or no difficulty the response is the generation of other literal questions which the students ask each other.

The same two steps are used to teach the inferential and critical types of questions. In the first step, when students are asked how they know the answer to an inferential question, typical responses include that the student guessed because of what it said in the selection, while critical questions are often termed opinion. In the second step, students may encounter greater difficulty in spontaneously generating inferential questions than either literal or critical questions. However, the generation of more and better questions of all three types is facilitated by the next phase of SAQ.

In the second phase students are encouraged to create and record questions during and after silent reading. In this phase, setting a purpose for reading is shared by teacher and student. As they think of questions of all three types, their purposes for reading are influenced by viewing the text literally and inferentially and by interacting with it on a critical level.

As the students participate in question-asking the teacher continues to use the model questions as well as guiding students in developing all three types of questions. It is important that the teacher guide the comprehension discussion to insure that the essential and appropriate features or issues of the written material are addressed. Ideally, question asking during the comprehension discussion will be shared by the teacher and students.

The final phase of SAQ is to encourage students to use their question asking ability to help determine answers to questions. Knowing that the answers to questions can be explicitly or implicitly stated in the material or be based on reader evaluation assists students in developing a process for seeking answers to questions and for seeking meaning as they read.

Experimental Evidence

The effect of SAQ on student question generation ability was investigated in an experiment involving twelve third grade classes in three schools in a urban setting in Georgia. In four classrooms the teachers followed their regular teaching procedures using the basal reader, while in another four teachers conscientiously asked students literal, inferential and critical questions during the comprehension discussion. In the four experimental classrooms, the students were taught using the SAQ procedure for the comprehension discussion. Students were taught from the same basal reading series in all the classrooms with students placed in level 7, 8, 9, or 10 by school personnel.

As a measure of question generation ability, students read an unfamiliar selection from the level of the basal in which they received instruction and were asked to spontaneously formulate questions about it. Data was gathered on 168 students, the high attrition rate being due to the transience of the population. An analysis of variance showed that the SAQ group generated significantly more questions ($p<.01$) and more of each type question than either of the two control groups ($p<.01$ for each type). The results also showed that students of low, average and high reading

abilities in the SAQ group generated significantly more literal ($p<.01$), inferential ($p<.05$) and critical ($p<.02$) questions than comparable students in either of the other groups.

It was believed by the teachers that the students benefited from reading as well as hearing the teacher questions and that their attention was focused on the task by the combined oral-visual presentation. Students seemed to have improved their ability to use language to word their questions. These factors and the long term affect on reading comprehension need to be researched.

Conclusions

SAQ has been demonstrated to be a simple, effective method for teaching urban third grade students to generate literal, inferential, and critical questions. Advantages of SAQ include its adaptability to any written materials and its effectiveness with varying sized groups. It has the additional benefits of increased student participation and the integration of reading, writing, and listening skills. Students Asking Questions can cause renewed enthusiasm for the instructional process while it involves readers in the process of thinking and communicating.

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